**Hot or Not?**

When Fashion Trends Die

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It's a fashion follower's worst nightmare -- worse than looking fat, more humiliating than wearing the same dress as another party guest -- it's the dread of looking *last year*.

Fashion trends, sometimes referred to as fads, are notoriously fickle. The fashion industry is always on the hunt for what's new, what's hot. For every new, must-have handbag, there's another that gets tossed aside like, well, last year's trend.

**The Fashion Cycle**

1. First, there's the emerging trend (the American Marketing Association refers to this as the "distinctiveness" part of the cycle where the trend is highly sought after. You know this as when you see that great hat/dress/shoe on the runway, red carpet or music video.
2. Next, comes what the AMA calls the emulation phase, where everyone wants a piece of the trend. You'll see it in fashion magazines, newspapers, internet and TV during this phase.
3. Finally, the trend becomes saturated in the market, usually at very low prices. With trendy items like a must-have designer handbag, the item becomes widely available as a knock-off.

Most of us will buy it somewhere between phases two and three. Only celebrities and fashion industry types have access to fashion fresh off the runway that hasn't appeared in stores yet, like in the first phase of a fashion trend.

At the second phase a look is often available in high-priced designer collections. Only in the third phase, when a look makes it to the mass market, does it become affordable for most consumers.

Twenty or 30 years ago it might have taken a few years to make it from red carpet to mass market, but today's manufacturers have put the fashion cycle into hyperspeed. Sometimes a hot trend makes it into lower priced retail outlets in as little as a few months.

**In or Out?**

Affordable trendy clothing (sometimes called "fast fashion") is a double-edged sword: it makes fashionable looks accessible to those of us on real-life budgets, but when the market is totally saturated with a look a trend loses its appeal. It basically helps to kill the trend quicker.

So how do you know how long a trend will last? A few general guidelines:

* Generally speaking, most fashion trends stick around for at least a year. Some trends, usually the most understandable ones, last longer. For example, the personalization or initial craze started with Sarah Jessica Parker's "Carrie" necklace during season two of "Sex and the City" in 1998. The look saturated the mass market in the fall 2003 with initial handbags, sweaters -- you name it -- a full five years after it started.
* One school of thought says that fashion cycles occur about every 20 years. Thus, the minis of the '80s have come back into favor in later years(as did the nameplate necklace mentioned above, which was hot then, too).
* A big part of deciding on how long a trend is viable depends on where in the fashion cycle you bought the trend. If you bought it as a knock-off or at a discount store, then you should count on it being in for just one or two seasons. Because the fashion industry often lumps together Spring and Summer, Fall and Winter, that gives you approximately six months of wear out of a look before it looks dated.
* Although there is no hard-and-fast rule about how long a fashion trend will stick around, you can bet that the more-difficult-to-pull-off looks (Uggs, large cuff jeans, trucker hats) are just fads that will fade. That doesn't mean you shouldn't have fun buying them, just know that they aren't looks that will be fresh this time next year.
* Buying power can keep a trend on life support. Sometimes consumers love a look so much they just won't let it die. Capris, crops, tank tops and flip flops are all examples of former trends which actually became wardrobe staples.
* The higher the profile -- boho chic and mod are recent examples -- the more likely it is that the trend will look dated by the same next year. Likewise, the more radical the cut, color or print -- microminis, army jackets, mod graphics -- the more certain that the trend will be long over by the same time next year.

The best defense against quickly changing trends is to have a wardrobe stocked with mostly classic looks: jeans, T-shirts, blazers, little black dresses. Use trendy items as an addition to a core wardrobe to give it some kick.

Assignment:

Research an article on the fashion cycle and create a visual aid to present your article to the class. Talk about how it relates to what we’ve talked about for this section.

